

**MACALESTER COLLEGE  
DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE**

**POLI 294.01 (Spring 2011)**

*Medieval Political Thought*

Professor Andrew Latham  
Office: Carnegie 203E  
Telephone: x6549

Location: CAR 107  
Time: T-Th, 1:20-2:50  
Office Hours: T-Th, 3:00-4:00

**DESCRIPTION, SCOPE AND PURPOSE**

This course deals with the political thought of Latin Christendom (Western Europe) during the later Middle Ages (c. 1050-c. 1550). This body of thought is worthy of sustained study for two reasons. First, it is one of the glories of human civilization. In seeking to answer the timeless questions “how we should live our lives as individuals” and “how we should live together in peace and justice” late medieval political thinkers produced a body of political thought second to none in the history of human philosophical speculation. Second, late medieval political thought is worthy of study because it gave rise to many of the concepts that continue to shape our collective lives today (including state sovereignty, separation of church and state, constitutionalism, just war, property rights, “the people”, nationalism, democracy, rule-of-law, and human rights). Indeed, it is impossible to really understand contemporary political life without delving deeply into the way in which late medieval thinkers engaged with the big political issues of their day.

The main goal of this course is to provide a solid introduction to the political thought of this crucially important era in human history. In it, we will critically examine the relevant works of thinkers such as St. Augustine, St. Thomas Aquinas, John of Paris, Marsilius of Padua, Bartolus of Sasseferato and Baldus de Ubaldis. To the extent that they shed light on late medieval thought, we will also touch on classical political theorists such as Aristotle and Cicero as well as Muslim and Jewish thinkers such as Ibn Sina, Moshe ben Maimon, and Ibn Rushd. The course is structured to promote an understanding not only of how these thinkers sought to address the pressing political challenges of their day, but also of how they “invented” many of the ideas that we – presumptuously and erroneously – have come to associate with the modern era. Particular attention will be paid to the discourses of “individual rights” and “state sovereignty” – discourses that were key to political life in late medieval Latin Christendom and that continue to shape global political life today.

An important secondary goal of the course is to trace the connections between political theory and political practice. Accordingly, considerable time is spent learning about the realities of late medieval political life.

As an intermediate-level offering, this course is designed primarily for Political Science majors and non-majors in cognate fields (such as Philosophy) who have some experience in the discipline. The course has no pre-requisites, however, and is therefore suitable for all students seeking to satisfy an interest in political theory/philosophy or the medieval roots of contemporary political life.

### **REQUIRED TEXTS AND OTHER SOURCES**

I have ordered several required texts for this course:

1. Canning, *A History of Medieval Political Thought, 300-1450*
2. Watts, *The Making of Polities: Europe, 1300-1500*.
3. Nederman and Forhan, *Readings in Medieval Political Theory, 1100-1400*.

In addition to the course texts, you may also find the following websites helpful:

- <http://the-orb.net/>
- <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/sbook.html>
- <http://www.netserf.org/>
- <http://www.medievalacademy.org/>
- <http://labyrinth.georgetown.edu/>
- <http://www.deremilitari.org/>
- <http://www.medievalsources.co.uk/>

### **ASSIGNMENTS**

At the end of each of Modules 2-4, you will be expected to write an open-book, take-home exam based on one of several questions provided at the beginning of the module

### **GRADING**

**Point-Based Grading:** Grading in this course is on a points system. Your final grade is out of 100 points distributed as follows:

|                |           |
|----------------|-----------|
| Exam #1:       | 30 points |
| Exam #2:       | 30 points |
| Exam #3:       | 30 points |
| Participation: | 10 points |

The following point-based grade scheme will be used to calculate your final grade in this course:

|               |    |              |    |              |    |
|---------------|----|--------------|----|--------------|----|
| 95-100 points | A  | 80-84 points | B  | 65-69 points | C  |
| 90-94 points  | A- | 75-79 points | B- | 60-64 points | C- |
| 85-89 points  | B+ | 70-74 points | C+ | 50-59 points | D  |
| 0-49 points   | NC |              |    |              |    |

**Appeals:** Only well-argued written appeals (no more than one page in length) will be accepted.

## **MODULE 1: BACKGROUND**

January 25     **Introduction and Organization of Work**

January 27     **Why Study Medieval Political Thought?**

- <http://listverse.com/2009/01/07/top-10-myths-about-the-middle-ages/>
- Nederman, 'Why Study Medieval Political Thought' (PDF)

### **Themes and Idioms in Medieval Political Thought**

- Nederman and Forhan text, 'Introduction'
- Canning text, 'Introduction' AND 'Introduction to 2005 Edition'
- Black, 'Introduction' (PDF)

February 1     **The Origins of Medieval Political Thought, 300-750**

- Canning, Ch. 1
- 'The Latin Fathers' (PDF)
- <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/source/aug-city1.html>

February 3     **No Class Today**

February 8 **Medieval Political Thought, 750-1200**

- Canning Text, ch. 2
- Luscombe and Evans, 'The Twelfth Century Renaissance' (PDF)
- Nederman and Forhan text, 'John of Salisbury'
- Nederman and Forhan text, 'Marie de France'

February 10 **Law in Medieval Political Life**

- Pennington, 'Law, Legislative Authority...' (PDF)
- <http://archiv.jura.uni-saarland.de/Rechtsgeschichte/Ius.Romanum/english.html>

**MODULE 2: THE THIRTEENTH CENTURY**

**Potential Take-Home Exam Questions:**

1. *Compare the political thought of Augustine and Aquinas. How are they similar? How do they differ? Which, if any, seems more relevant to contemporary political life?*
2. *Assess the role of "law" in shaping thirteenth century political thought.*
3. *Evaluate the merits of the case for papal political supremacy. Do you think that the pope or emperor had the superior claim to ultimate political authority?*
4. *Explain the birth of natural or human rights during this era.*

February 15 **The Political Context**

- Watts, 43-128.

February 17 **The Political Context (Cont'd)**

- Watts, 129-157

February 22 **Trends in Political Thought (1200-1300): Texts and Contexts**

- Canning, 82-134.

February 24 **Examples of Political Thought**

- Nederman and Forhan, 69-154.

March 1 **The Origins of Natural (Human) Rights**

- <http://faculty.cua.edu/pennington/Law508/tierney2.htm>
- <http://faculty.cua.edu/pennington/Law508/Sovereignty.htm>
- <http://www.law.northwestern.edu/journals/jihr/v2/2/>
- <http://works.bepress.com/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1003&context=siegfried>
- [http://www.helsinki.fi/collegium/e-series/volumes/volume\\_4/06\\_makinen\\_2008\\_4.pdf](http://www.helsinki.fi/collegium/e-series/volumes/volume_4/06_makinen_2008_4.pdf)
- <http://www.humanities.mq.edu.au/Ockham/HelsinkiA.html>

March 3 **Take-Home Exam**

March 8 **The Origins of Sovereign Statehood**

- Latham (PDF)

March 10 **No Class Today**

**MODULE 3: THE FOURTEENTH CENTURY**

March 22 **The Political Context**

- Watts 158-262

March 24 **The Political Context**

- Watts 263-286

March 29 **Trends in Political Thought**

- Canning 135-73

March 31 **Examples of Political Thought**

- Nederman and Forhan, chs. 9-11

April 5

**Just War Theory**

- Bellamy (PDF)
- Russell (PDF)

April 7

**Just War Theory (Cont'd)**

- Latham (PDF)
- Online Primary Sources (TBA)

April 12

**Conciliarism and the Origins of Parliamentary Democracy**

- Black, Ch. 6 (PDF)
- Canning 174-84.

April 14

**Take-Home Exam**

**MODULE 4: THE FIFTEENTH CENTURY**

April 19

**Political Context**

- Watts 287-375

April 21

**Political Context**

- Watts 376-426

April 26

**State and Nation**

- Guenée, ch. 3 (PDF)
- Black, ch. 3 (PDF)
- <http://www.flw.ugent.be/btng-rbhc/pdf/BTNG-RBHC,%2034,%202004,%204,%20pp%20567-579.pdf>
- Davies article (PDF)
- Reynolds article (PDF)

April 28

**Take-Home Exam**